

Janet's 50kg weight loss

Why this life saving surgery is on the rise

BY DONNA SHARPE

AT HER worst, East Maitland woman Janet Shone weighed 150 kilos, couldn't walk up stairs and was sick of being 'the fat chick' in the room.

She tried all manner of diets but nothing worked and she had reached the end of her tether - didn't want to get out of bed, couldn't look at herself in the mirror.

Ten months ago Janet underwent gastric bypass surgery and has so far lost 50 kilograms and has a new lease on life.

She is one of the growing number of people to undergo surgical weight loss procedures, which according to bariatric and upper gastrointestinal surgeon and former Maitland High student Dr Dhan Thiruchelvam, are saving lives.

"I've been a bariatric surgeon for over 13 years and in that time there has certainly been an increase in weight loss surgery - probably about 10 per cent," he said.

"My explanation for this is that patients, GP's and specialists understand the far reaching benefits of it. It has become a mainstream treatment option and part of a multidisciplinary approach to obesity management."

"Gastric banding in the 90's and 2000's was often the more common or preferred procedure prior to gastric sleeve and some people thought it had more of a cosmetic element to it," Dr Thiruchelvam said.

But there are so many more benefits than just the aesthetics surrounding weight loss surgery.

Dr Thiruchelvam said it

can result in diabetes resolution, improvements to sleep apnoea, blood pressure, fatty liver disease, polycystic ovarian syndrome, and mobility.

In fact many of his patients are referred from other specialists including respiratory, cardiologists, orthopaedic surgeons or kidney doctors. "This surgery can improve heart function, sugar control and reduce medication requirements," he said.

And some of those boxes have been ticked for Janet, 58, a grandmother of seven. "I want to hang around a bit longer for the grandkids and I knew I had to do something because nothing else was working," she said.

Janet did not have private health cover and drew \$20,000 from her super to fund what she has described as the best decision of her life.

"My cholesterol and blood sugar readings were high now they are normal, I can chase around after the grandkids, I walk around Maitland Park twice every morning and I feel good - great in fact," Janet said.

"I've dropped from a dress size 24 to a 16 or 18." While her goal weight is 80kg, Janet said it's not the numbers she is worried about. It's about how I feel and physically and mentally. I'm really proud of myself - sometimes I just can't believe it.

"I've always been big, never thin and I'm getting some great comments and that's nice because I don't feel like the fat lady anymore. When you walk into a room when you're big, you can always see people looking at you and you know they see you



INSPIRATIONAL: Janet Shone is one of the growing number of people undergoing weight loss surgery. **PICTURE:** Simone De Peak.



BEFORE: Janet pictured with family and friends before her surgery in August last year which she said has been life changing and life saving.

as the fat lady," she said.

Dr Thiruchelvam said the procedures are becoming more common and more people are seeing the results friends or relatives have had.

"Having said that there are also risks as there are with any surgery. We have discussions with our patients around surgery risks, but we also have to talk to them about the risks if they do nothing. There is a cumulative risk of all these problems - all their metabolic disor-

ders. " Gastric sleeve seems to be the most popular weight loss procedure with about 70 per cent of patients opting for it as opposed to the gastric bypass.

Dr Thiruchelvam said that in simple terms, the sleeve procedure involves narrowing the stomach whereas the bypass surgery means a new, smaller stomach is created and an element of the small bowel is passed.

Once a patient has been referred to a specialist bar-

iatric surgeon they are assessed, usually twice by their specialist prior to surgery.

They must also go on a low calorie food diet 2-4 weeks leading up to their procedure. Surgery lasts about one and a half to two hours depending on the patient's Body Mass Index. They usually spend two nights in hospital and return to work two weeks post surgery.

"This surgery is life changing and yes in some cases life saving and patients will find



SPECIALIST SURGEON: Dr. Dhan Thiruchelvam said he has seen a 10 per cent growth in the number of weight loss surgeries he is performing.

they can do a lot more that they couldn't do before," Dr Thiruchelvam said.

The new look and the new body does come at a price - both to the hip pocket and to the patient's lifestyle.

"If you don't alter inappropriate eating habits you will regain the weight. We run a weight loss program for a year post surgery and follow up patients long term to ensure they have developed proper eating habits and some exercise."